

**OPENING SESSION STATEMENT**

**for the**

**SECOND WORLD CONGRESS ON THE**

**COMMERCIAL SEXUAL EXPLOITATION OF CHILDREN**

**by**

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Distinguished delegates, ladies and gentlemen. On behalf of United States, I would like to express our gratitude for the graciousness and hospitality of the Government of Japan. I would also like to thank Japan, ECPAT International, the NGO Group for the Convention on the Rights of the Child, and UNICEF for co-sponsoring this extraordinary event.

As we gather here in Yokohama from all over the world, we should be proud of our accomplishments during the five years since we met in Stockholm. But we all know that our job will not be done until predators are stopped from preying on our children, until our children are safe at home and on the Internet, and until all our children are free from sexual abuse and exploitation so that they can grow and mature in a healthy environment; and are given the chance to lead happy and productive lives.

Although the world's population continues to grow and many nations have continued to develop since we last met in Stockholm, emerging technologies and ease of travel have also made the world, in a very real and remarkable way, a smaller place.

The Internet is rapidly transforming the way all of us communicate, educate, debate the issues of the day, and buy and sell goods and services. The Internet empowers people to share aspirations and common experiences, and to broaden their horizons. It is indeed a bold new world. Equally, and sadly true, this powerful new medium enables wrongdoers to commit evil acts in new ways and with greater ease.

It has been estimated that, in the United States alone, approximately 12 million children log on to the Internet every day, and the number is growing rapidly. When a child connects to the Internet, that child has, in effect, left the safety and security of his or her home for cyberspace, where he or she can travel all over the world with just the click of a mouse, and is vulnerable to the online entreaties of child molesters and exploiters, who act in relative anonymity. Given this reality, we must all devise new strategies to confront offenders.

The United States is very proud of its record of addressing the commercial sexual exploitation of children at both the federal and state levels. Even prior to the Stockholm Conference, all of our 50 states and territories had laws outlawing child pornography, prostitution, and exploitation. I am pleased to state that our federal laws are even stronger today than they were then. Since Stockholm, the United States has broadened the scope of services provided to the victims of CSEC, has expanded the coverage of its CSEC laws, and has significantly increased the penalties for CSEC offenders in some cases, up to life imprisonment.

Of particular note is the Victims of Trafficking Protection Act, a sweeping new law, which among other things, provides greater tools to go after those who traffic in children, and establishes an inter-agency task force, that is being chaired by the State Department, to coordinate and implement provisions of the law. Pursuant to this law, the State Department has also recently established the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons.

The process of improving our laws is, of course, ongoing. As our collective experience exposes flaws or weaknesses in our laws, the Bush Administration will work with Congress to fix them. For example, the Bush Administration has proposed, and Congress is currently considering, ways to toughen our laws against the sex traveler and the sex tourist operator, to punish those who travel, and who arrange such travel, into and out of United States to sexually exploit our children and your children. Most significantly, the Bush Administration has proposed the elimination of a pre-existing intent requirement when people actually commit these heinous offenses. In general, the United States will continue to refine its laws to respond to technological change, to advances in investigative techniques and tools, and to the needs of victims -and we would call on other nations to do the same.

President Bush recognizes, however, that laws, no matter how well drafted, are not going to stop those who sexually exploit children if they are not backed up by strong law enforcement. Various agencies throughout the federal government, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation, the Immigration and Naturalization Service, the Customs Service, and the Postal Inspection Service, working closely with local and state law enforcement officials, investigate hundreds, if not thousands, of CSEC cases each year.

The United States has more than doubled its annual rate of convictions since Stockholm and, despite the recent and renewed focus on terrorism, we will continue to pursue CSEC cases even more aggressively in the future. In addition to our strong multi-agency approach to child pornography, we have active prosecutions against those who exploit our youth through prostitution. For example, two years ago, we broke up a multi-generational, family-run business that sold children and youth for sexual purposes night after night in states throughout the Northern United States. Federal prosecutors in Atlanta, Georgia are currently preparing to try the last 2 of 15 defendants -the other 13 having already pled guilty -who ran a prostitution ring that marketed 11-16 year old girls in cities throughout the Southeastern United States.

As I alluded to before, the fight against CSEC is truly an international effort. Since the Stockholm Conference, we have been pleased to work with many of you in this fight. As part of that effort, the United States was one of the first countries to ratify ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labor, and is giving immediate attention to ratification of the Optional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child on the Sale of Children, Child Prostitution, and Child Pornography. Our Department of Labor has enthusiastically supported the ILO's International Program on the Elimination of Child Labor by funding projects in Africa, Asia, and Latin America that rescue children from commercial sexual exploitation and provide them with trauma counseling and educational opportunities. Although there is clearly more work to be done, we have enjoyed many successes together. One such success was Operation Cheshire Cat, which was part of the international Operation Cathedral, in which our Customs Service worked closely with the United Kingdom's National Crime Squad and other law enforcement authorities to combat a worldwide child pornography trading ring involving more than 100 suspects in 14 countries.

Recently, working with Europol and the Royal Thai Police, the United States was able to apprehend Eric Rosser, the first sex offender to be included on the FBI's 10 Most Wanted List. Mr.

Rosser, a well-known musician and teacher, molested children on at least two continents. Through our cooperative efforts, Mr. Rosser will be spending the next several years in prison –where he can't molest children and where he deserves to be.

President Bush is proud of the fact that the United States has played a leading role in providing training at home and throughout the world to law enforcement and social service personnel about how to root out CSEC offenders and how to provide appropriate assistance and comfort to the child and youth victims of sexual exploitation. We have met and formed partnerships with the organizations of civil society –including non-governmental organizations that provide the services and programs to youth and families, and outreach workers who protect and steer at-risk and exploited youth back on a path towards safety and productivity. Our Departments of Health and Human Services, Labor, and Housing and Urban Development are pleased to work with NGOs through various programs to provide child victims of sexual exploitation, including child victims of child prostitution, with housing, shelter, mental and physical health services, and job training.

While on the topic of child victims of child prostitution, it is with some regret that I digress for a moment to talk about the proposed outcome document from this conference. The document envisions a world in which child prostitutes are viewed solely as child victims and are not criminalized or penalized. This is indeed a laudable goal. Nonetheless, in the experience of the United States, we have found that, in instances in which child victims of prostitution have not voluntarily sought social services which could help them turn their lives around, the most effective way, and sometimes the only way, to get such children into social services that can help restore their sense of self-dignity is to utilize the criminal justice system.

Most victims of child prostitution who enter our criminal justice system are diverted to social service programs without suffering the additional stigma..of a penalty or a criminal record. Nonetheless, sadly, that is not always possible. The United States believes that countries must retain the flexibility to help children by keeping them within the criminal justice system or else many of them will be doomed to return to a life of danger and degradation. Accordingly, the United States must reserve our position with respect to this portion of the outcome document.

That said, the Bush Administration recognizes that, unless provided a safe environment in which to live and the necessary skills to re-integrate into society, a sexually-exploited child faces the ever-present risk of being victimized again. It is only through these collective efforts that we can deal with this scourge at all levels through prevention, protection, and prosecution.

Yes, it is a bold new world, but we remain undaunted by the challenges we face. The United States wants your help; we need your help. We need to close our doors to child pornographers, traffickers, and predators –and to the seen and unseen horrors they present.

We recognize that no child can consent to being exploited they are victims and need our help. Childhood is a time to be safe, secure, and happy –it is a time for dreams, not nightmares. It is our moral imperative to ensure that children be free from sexual abuse so that they can grow into productive and responsible adults. Let us remain resolute. Together, let us renew our commitment to our children. Thank you.

